

INDIAN MEAL MOTH

Lepidoptera: Pyralidae

By Eric Day

SIZE: About 3/8 inch (10mm) long at rest; wing spread is about 5/8 inch (14mm).

COLOR: Bronze-colored wings.

DESCRIPTION: When at rest the wings are folded together along the line of the body. The front half of the forewings is a grayish-white color, and the lower half is a rusty red-brown color.

HABITAT: The adult moths usually fly at night and lay eggs on food such as grain, dried food, and especially pet food.

LIFE CYCLE: The life cycle and habits of this pantry pest is similar to other moths infesting stored products. Eggs are laid on or near the food. A female moth may deposit from 40 to 350 eggs. After hatching, the small caterpillars begin spinning silken threads in the infested food material. They feed for about two weeks before becoming full-grown. They crawl up to the surface of the food material or often up walls and pupate within a cocoon. The adult emerges in about 30 days. The entire cycle requires about six weeks and there are from 4-6 generations per year.

TYPE OF DAMAGE: The Indian meal moth is one of the most common and troublesome of the moths infesting stored products. The caterpillar stage of this insect will feed on a variety of grains, meal, breakfast foods, dried nuts, seeds, chocolate, powdered milk, and especially dry pet foods. Infested material may be more or less webbed together. Small two-colored moths (gray and reddish-brown) will also be seen flying about the infested area.

CONTROL: Control of this pest begins with the location of the infested food. A thorough clean up, using a vacuum cleaner to get into the cracks and crevices, will control this pest.

INTERESTING FACTS: Adults fly in a zigzag fashion if disturbed during the day. Their lifespan is one to two weeks.



Indian meal moth larvae and adult. Clemson University-USDA Cooperative Extension Slide Series. Bugwood.org.